Give Palestinians a chance

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The United States historic first step towards direct talks with the PLO has certainly ruffled the feathers of the Israelis. Let us examine the current situation.

Over the past year the Palestinian uprising in the occupied Gaza Territory has raised the eyebrows of the world community. Over the last 12 months we have collectively witnessed Israeli troops employing overwhelming force to quell the Infitada. Not long ago the American television audience watched as Israeli soldiers broke the arms of rock-throwing protestors. We have continually witnessed the occupying forces blowing up refugee housing in response to civil unrest. We have seen the faces of the aged Palestinian women weeping for the loss of their children. And now we have heard the words of Yassir Arafat.

These words have renounced the use of terrorism as a means of forwarding a political agenda. These words have explicitly recognized the right of Israel to exist as well as seeking peaceful coexistance between a Palestinian state and Israel. Yet the Israeli government emphatically states that these words are not enough. Israel says that a paragraph renouncing terrorism in a United Nations speech does not demonstrate an abandonment of terrorist activities.

However, the uprising in Gaza should not be equated with terrorism. While the refugees are not practicing the Ghandian method of civil disobedience how many movements for independence have? Surely Israel needs only to search its own recent past. The current and some former Prime Ministers of Israel have used certain elements of terrorism in order to establish a Jewish homeland. Why are not the Palestinians entitled to their own state? Not in Jordan but in a newly created state called Palestine.

Moreover, has the Israeli response to the Infitada been proper and proportional? The closing of schools, interment camps, the cutting off of news from the outside world and the destruction of housing seems to be excessive.

Of course Mr. Arafat's words must translate into deeds. If the PLO violates the precepts set forth in Arafat's proposals then they forfeit their right of statehood. The PLO has come a long way in moderating their views toward Israel. They have accepted the contents of the two UN respolutions which Israel said was a precondition to any type of negotiations. Is it not time for Israel to work for peace in the Middle East?

Israel's major concern is security and properly so. However the military might of all the Arab nations cannot match that of Israel. Moreover, the United States would not allow the Israel state to become endangered. It is truly ironic that the very concept that Israel fought so proudly for, freedom and sovereignty, is something they seek to repress and deny. The world, including the United States, is beginning to see the unfair rigidity of the current Israeli stance.

Finally, we must challenge Mr. Arafat's statements. He has accepted the preconditions to negotiations. Israel cannot keep changing the rules of the game. Give the Palestinians a chance at self-determination. If peace is to prevail the strong and secure (the United States and Israel) must initiate and further it. The United States has taken a major step in the interest of peace. Israeli reciprocity is now appropriate.

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